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Sent: Wednesday, June 29, 2011 11:16 AM

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Subject: Our legacy (Comp Plan amendments)

Dear GMPC members,

King County's Comprehensive Plan has been in effect for almost 2 decades now. Supported by various pre-existing efforts to responsibly accommodate growth, our Comp Plan is beginning to pay dividends. Like a person in the late teens, our region's development is now poised to move beyond its adolescent phase.

King County can mature into a shining example of economic vitality coupled with the desirable Pacific Northwest quality of life, but only if we stay committed to the dependable growth planning policies that have served us to this threshold.

One of the keys to promoting healthy communities is preventing sprawl development patterns. Preventing sprawl provides a beneficial back pressure of development energies and resources into our existing Urban communities. This also helps to reduce the scope and expense of the infrastructure that is required to support our growth. a

Since the inception of our Comp Plan, we have seen much relatively low density infill of our designated Urban areas, too often with the same patterns of strip mall sprawl that are rapidly becoming obsolete. However, most of those areas are becoming built out and the patterns of development are beginning to change. Bellevue is an obvious example, as residential development in the core compliments access to businesses and retail services. Rail lines under development and improvements to the road systems compliment that trend.

But few cities around King County aspire to Bellevue's downtown density...nor should they.

In our lower profile Urban communities, new visions are emerging to transform failing strip mall wastelands, such as Totem Lake, into a "mixed use" model, where residential mixes with commercial and services. It is good news to forward thinking policy makers that the cheap slab-on-grade buildings and the seas of asphalt parking lots that characterize these blighted areas will be relatively easy to remove to make way for the new.

Similarly, the City of Woodinville has updated its zoning to encourage multi-use buildings in its strip mall core, allowing growth to up instead of out. Extending from Renton to Snohomish, the preserved Burlington Northern rail corridor passes through both of these communities and is poised to compliment our road systems in providing efficient links between these and other urban centers in the coming decades.

Variations of these examples can be found throughout our county. The more we uphold the principles of our Comp Plan, the more we will see of this evolution toward more efficient and livable urban communities.

Meanwhile, upholding our Comp Plan policies benefits our diverse Rural communities as well. Whether we talk of farms, forests, rivers or fresh air, all of these resources are protected by holding tight the lines we have drawn as our Urban Growth Boundary. This serves not just the people who live and work in Rural King County, but our "urban" population as well. Everyone benefits from the local food, fresh air, clean water and recreational access that our Rural areas provide.

There are three crucial elements that define how successful we will ultimately be in preserving the synergy between our Rural and Urban areas.

First, we hold the Urban Growth Boundary where it is, with very limited exceptions. The precedent that would be set by allowing piecemeal conversion of Rural to Urban would set the stage for more creeping sprawl and, eventually, evidence that we ever aspired to maintain our Rural areas would be buried.

Second, "urban" infrastructure and services must remain within Urban boundaries. Specifically, sewer service and schools designed to serve Urban populations must be kept within the Urban boundaries. Siting schools within Urban boundaries not only protects our Rural areas from being paved over and from the added traffic congestion, it also benefits the Urban area. By siting the schools near where the most students live, drive times, or better yet, walk or bicycle times, are greatly reduced everyday. Again, less infrastructure cost, better quality of life... the list of benefits goes on.**

Third, we need to think in terms of decades, not years. Much of the policy we have in place today will not be put to use for a long time, especially if the overall economy is slow to recover. When we think of how this will play out in 20, 40, 60 years or more, our perspectives change. For positive long term results, we need to put the policies in place and give them time to work. Decades.

Our Comp Plan is working. If we allow its principles to be degraded, the citizen and business communities will see it as fungible, which has been the prime ingredient for failures of land use planning across our country.

We can do, and we are doing, better.

I want to see us leave a legacy we can be proud of. We are on the right road with our Comp Plan. Let's stick with it.

Sincerely,

Michael Tanksley
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Woodinville, WA

** A good example of where this dynamic will be played out is the upcoming Black Diamond MDP. With appropriate planning, there is plenty of land available within Black Diamond's plan area to accommodate its future population's school needs.

An example of what happens when a school is inappropriately sited in a remote Rural area is Timbercrest JHS, east of Woodinville. Land was cheaper out there, but the population growth and student base has come mostly from the cities. Every day, Northshore Schools has to bus students large distances because the facility, as nice as it is, is remotely sited. And the parents face the same drive when they need to get to the school. My children went to Leota JHS - a 10 minute drive from home. Now, due to changed demographics, they would be going to Timbercrest - a 20 to 30 minute drive depending on traffic.

This is avoidable in Black Diamond. This precedent for urban services to be accommodated within our Urban boundaries will apply (or not) across King County.